

VZCZCXYZ0005
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHDM #0846/01 3411454
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 071454Z DEC 09
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7094
INFO RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0807
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0762
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0739
RUEHUNV/USMISSION UNVIE VIENNA PRIORITY 0089
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0765
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 000846

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA, DRL/NESCA
LONDON FOR LORD, PARIS FOR NOBLES

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/07/2019
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KMPI](#) [SCUL](#) [SOCI](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS ROUNDUP: CIVIL SOCIETY (STILL)
SUFFERING

Classified By: CDA Charles Hunter for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In recent weeks the Syrian security services have stepped up their already rapid pace of detentions, targeting members of the Damascus Declaration National Council and two writers, one of whom reportedly disappeared in Beirut and is now believed to be in Syrian custody. These arrests topped off a particularly active month of November for the State Security Court, which convicted at least 12 individuals on political charges and conducted hearings on dozens of similar cases. End Summary.

Damascus Declaration Detainees

¶2. (SBU) The evisceration of the Damascus Declaration's leadership continued with the November 15 arrest of Yusef Abdullah Deeb and the November 29 arrest of Khalaf Ibrahim al-Muhammad (al-Jarboua), both of whom were members of the Declaration's National Council. Deeb, in addition to his political activism, was a moderate Islamic scholar and had, for a time, served as an Imam before Syrian authorities forbade his public preaching. Immigration police reportedly detained al-Muhammad at the Syrian-Lebanese border as he was traveling to Beirut and transferred him to the Political Security headquarters in Damascus. Al-Muhammad spent 1980 to 1984 in prison for his affiliation with Riad al-Turk's Communist Party - Political Bureau (now called The People's Democratic Party).

Communist Action Party

¶3. (SBU) In May, security services reportedly disrupted a meeting of Communist Action Party members, arresting Abbas Abbas (66 years old), Ahmad Nihawi, Hasan Zahra, Tawfik Omran, and Ghassan Hasan. Abbas, Nihawi, and Zahra were all founding members of the party and Abbas served on the party's central committee. The purpose of the meeting, we've heard, was to prepare for a conference; some people speculate the prospect of a party conference prompted the SARG to act. Contacts reported the five men's whereabouts had remained unknown until their individual case files were recently submitted to the State Security Court for future trial, revealing they were being held at Sednaya Prison. All five men are former political prisoners; Abbas spent a total of 20 non-consecutive years in prison for his political activism

and Nihawi 15 years.

Disappear/Reappear

¶4. (C) In recent weeks, two different Embassy contacts have alleged Syrian activists are still being "disappeared" from Lebanon and ending up in the hands of Syrian security. Razan Zeitunah (strictly protect) told us the wife of Kurdish writer Ahmed Mustafa Muhammad (pen name: Pier Rustum and author of 14 books), who disappeared from Beirut on October 24, had confirmed to the Kurdish Organization for the Defense of Human Rights that Rustum was being held in Damascus by Syrian security. This is but the latest in a series of harassing detentions for Rustum. In December 2007, he was held in custody for a day. Three months later, Air Force security detained him from March 15 to 23, 2008. Rustum, according to Zeitunah's Syrian Human Rights Link website, is a member of the Kurdish Organization for the Defense of Human Rights, the Damascus Declaration, and the Kurdish Democratic Party (al-Party) Central Committee.

¶5. (C) Wissam Tarif (strictly protect), an Embassy contact in Beirut, recently notified us about the death of Omar Sati, a 23-year-old Lebanese citizen who had been studying in Syria. According to Tarif, Sati was detained in Syria for over a year and allegedly died under torture sometime in October, at which point his body was returned to his family in Lebanon. Tarif noted Omar had reportedly been detained "because he had relations with Islamists."

Kurdish Activists

¶6. (C) Canadian diplomats attending a closed-door November 15 session of the Second Criminal Court in Damascus reported that three leaders of the Kurdish Azadi party were each sentenced to three years in prison for (1) weakening national sentiment or inciting racial and sectarian tensions while Syria is at/expecting war (Penal Code Article 285); (2) establishing "an organization with the aim of changing the financial or social status of the state" (Article 306); and (3) "undertaking acts, writings or speech that incite sectarian, racial or religious strife" (Article 307). The three men are Mustafa Juma'a Bakar, Deputy Secretary (arrested January 10), Muhammad Said al-Omar and Sa'dun Sheikhu, both members of the party's central committee and both arrested by Syrian Military Intelligence on October 26, ¶2008.

Syrian Supreme State Security Court (SSSC)

¶7. (C) During a November 22 SSSC session, the court convicted the Kurd Mustafa Sheikhu for attempting to "integrate Syrian territory to a foreign state" (Article 267), according to a Canadian Embassy and European Commission observers. Sheikhu received five years in prison. Also sentenced, according to the observers' report, were Osama Haj Slimane to six years on three different charges, one of which was for "illegitimate affiliations with foreign states" (NFI); Tamam Shikh Muni for weakening national sentiment, length unknown; Tariq Muhammad Amir al-Shami on approximately five charges, including "participation in illegal political organizations and illegal affiliations with foreign states"; Sidu Rashid Ali to six years, charges unknown; Mudar Faysal Yaghi for spreading false news with the aim of weakening national sentiments and inciting racist or sectarian strife, length unknown; and Abdul Rahman Shab Sheikh for seven years, charges unknown; Abdul Rahman Mustafa Mahmud, a Kurd, received six years under Article 267; Bassam Faysal al-Ahmad received five years, charges unknown; Ra'ed Fawaz Ali and Nasser Muhammad received six years each for possessing explosives and another inaudible charge; Maher Abdul Wahab Allouche and Hassan Sheikh Hamoud were convicted under Article 306, length

unknown; Masud Sheikh Moussa Ibrahim, a Kurd, received six years under Article 267; and Dalf Fares Muhammad received a life sentence for espionage that was immediately reduced to 10 years. (Note: Since the arrest of Muhanad al-Hasani, it has been hard for diplomats to get accurate reports on SSSC hearings, or to even know precisely when they will take place. An added difficulty is that the SSSC judge purposefully speaks at such a low level that he is sometimes inaudible. Very often the defendant standing immediately in front of him cannot understand the judge. End note.)

18. (C) Comment: From detention to conviction, the SARG appears unrelenting in its quest to eliminate political messages that cross the regime's redlines. We anticipate SARG pressure to continue up to and through the projected summer 2010 release of the 12 members of the Damascus Declaration convicted in 2008, so that the leaders, as they emerge, find themselves in a barren landscape.
HUNTER